

## ***Braumuller named PBA fire chief***

***by Rachel Newton***

The retirement of Arsenal Fire Chief Darrell McGee in January left a space to fill at the Pine Bluff Arsenal Fire Department. That job has been awarded, as of May 8, to the Arsenal's own Assistant Fire Chief Tom Braumuller.

"My career actually started as a volunteer firefighter in Oceanport, N.J.," said Braumuller. "I was a rookie firefighter, fresh out of the fire academy. That area is predominately all volunteers, very much like the towns around here. So, I started there with absolutely no thought or aspirations at the time to become a career firefighter."

One day, Braumuller said that the fire chief at Fort Monmouth, N.J., one of his fire service instructors called him up and said he had a job opening. He asked him if he was interested in going full-time as a firefighter. "At the time I was working as a logistics specialist at Fort Monmouth. He had seen me fight fires and make rescues," he said. "I applied for the job along with others. I got the job and worked for a while as a firefighter, but was eventually placed in the area of fire prevention, one of my interests and strengths."

The next 12 years, he spent as a fire inspector. "The mission at Fort Monmouth is vastly different than Pine Bluff Arsenal," he said. "Their area is communications, research and development. I was able to work with chemists and other scientists who were filing patents on systems that Soldiers were using in the field, such as night vision and other thermal communications systems."

Braumuller said what made it interesting is that the base was made up of laboratories and business occupants, roughly 1200 building. "Fifty were classified as high-rise buildings. The average occupancy of each building was 750 to 1000 people per building," he said. "I covered just about 1400 acres but those acres crossed state highways and three areas that were geographically separated. We had two fire stations. I did respond to fires since I was part of the Incident Command System (ICS), and I also worked as a firefighter/EMT (emergency medical technician), and HAZ MAT technician with WMD (weapons of mass destruction)."

His usual audiences for his fire inspection briefings usually included about 1000 people in a theater, said Braumuller. "I was used to dealing with large groups of people," he said.

As a member of the military for 24 years, Braumuller said it is funny how your world comes around full circle sometimes. "While I was in the military, I used to fire mortar illumination rounds," he said. "I had no idea that the rounds that I used to fire were made at the place I now work. I thought that was pretty neat."

In the federal fire service, Braumuller said it is difficult to move up in the ranks the closer you get to chief. "You have to be mobile and have the ability to pick up and move," he said. "You also have to be knowledgeable about many systems and missions so that you can apply."

Braumuller said when he applied here at PBA, Chief McGee asked him to fly out and interview. "My interview was six hours long. He wanted to make it worth my plane ticket. It was very in-depth, especially in my knowledge base of chemical weapons, white and red phosphorus, production lines, HAZ-MAT and structural firefighting. So, I guess I did well," he laughed.

In May 2004, Braumuller became the Arsenal's assistant fire chief. "I learned a lot about the Arsenal," he said. "Things are done very different here from other installations. This is because we are an Army Working Capital Installation, our missions are different, and our business practices are different."

Coming from Fort Monmouth, he said that it was different because it was basically research and development. "They were taking products that were already out there and improving upon them. Projects there lasted about 10 or 12 years and eventually were phased out," he said. "Here the mission is consistent. There is always research and development going on. But, the bottom line is we are out there supporting the Soldier right on the front lines."

This impacts the fire department in that they protect the workers and the facilities that do the production lines and the mask lines that directly support the Soldier, he said. "We also provide fire

protection and EMS services to the Soldiers and the families stationed here, as well as the workers who are here daily,” he said. “We are more of an indirect support to the Soldier but viable and important. We have changed the mindset of the firefighters to make them feel as if they contribute directly to the mission of the Arsenal. Their training, research and studying is more intense. This is to make them better firefighters so they can understand fire behavior and the chemistry of fire. It isn’t always putting wet stuff on the red stuff anymore. Different tactics must be used.”

Braumuller said that when he told people at Fort Monmouth (which was one of the bases on the BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure) list) that he was going to Pine Bluff Arsenal in Arkansas they looked at him and asked him why. “I told them it was a career move. It is something different. I had lived in the south before so it was not a foreign country,” he said. “We (my wife, Jackie) picked up stakes and moved. I was fortunate I got a promotion to assistant fire chief and here two years later I’m fire chief. Who would have thought? Sometimes it takes as much as 10 years to make it to chief from the rank of assistant chief.”

He said he feels extremely fortunate to be here because there are some highly-dedicated firefighters here. “The quiet comes and goes,” he said. “We can go from zero to 200 in seconds. The lack of fires here comes from the strong fire prevention program in place and the conscientious workers in the field. This is a great place to work and live.”